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## West Thames Field, 'Hostage' to Agency Feud, Finally Reopens

Submitted by admin on Thu, 08/11/2011 - 11:27pm



CARL GLASSMAN / TRIBECA TRIB

Jake Giarraputo, 8, was disappointed to find the field closed at West Thames Park recently despite signs on the fence that said it would open that day.

Wrangling between state agencies appears to have finally come to an end this week, paving the way for a reopening of West Thames Park field. The field officially opened on rainy Monday morning, Aug. 15.

At the center of the delays have been disagreements between the state Department of Transportation, which built the park, and the Battery Park City Authority, which will take possession and maintain it. Only when the Authority deems that the park, which includes the adjoining playground, is finished and in good order would it agree to take ownership and allow the lawn to open.

That agreement has been hard to come by. The most recent conflict, in a series of seemingly petty disputes, according to the source, was whether the state should provide the Authority with spare parts for the play equipment, bench slats and drinking fountain.

"The lawn is hostage to the whole park," the source said prior to the reported agreement. "That is the fact. The lawn is not the holdup here. It's like the tail wagging the dog."

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A true opening date will be welcome news for Battery Park City kids, who have spent most of the summer looking at a field of green grass from the other side of a fence.

"I am eager like crazy," 8-year-old Jake Giarraputo said last week, pointing to a notice on the fence that declared the latest promise—unkept—of an opening date. "It's had like a million signs."

The field, which turned into a muddy mess last year shortly after it opened, closed in May so that state Department of Transportation contractors could lay down a different type of sod. It was first slated to reopen on July 22, but bureaucratic squabbles kept pushing the date back.

Both the Battery Park City Authority and the state Department of Transportation were silent on the dispute until Friday, when they announced through a two-sentence email that the field would be opening and the BPCA would be maintaining it. The announcement confirmed the Trib's story, posted earlier, that the field will open on Monday.

The final checklist for construction was just the latest in a string of disagreements between the Authority and the DOT, which undertook the \$9.4 million renovation of West Thames Park as part of its reconstruction of West Street.

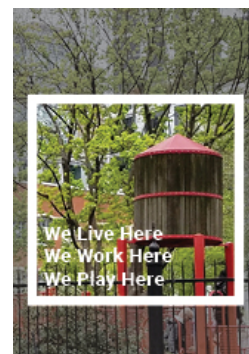
Work to fix the playing field's sod was initially delayed this spring while the DOT tried to negotiate a maintenance agreement for the park with the Authority. (The Authority's Parks Conservancy used to maintain the park before the DOT renovated it, but balked at taking up the task again because it said the new park would be much more expensive to care for.)

The park has had other problems since it opened last year. In particular, a water feature in the playground developed drainage problems creating standing pools of water and concerns among parents about the health effects on their children.

That issue was resolved. Now the one over a beautiful new lawn is, too.

"I am pretty frustrated," Giarraputo's mom, Ann Glass, said earlier this month. "We've been waiting all summer for this."

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## BPC Residents Sound Off on Neighborhood to Authority Prez

Submitted by admin on Fri, 11/18/2011 - 7:25pm

Battery Park City residents got a chance to take their gripes to the top Thursday night with a Battery Park City Authority-sponsored "Town Hall" held at P.S. 276. At the meeting, attended by some 75 residents, BPCA president Gayle Horwitz responded to a variety of complaints. Here are some of them.

### Rat Infestation

Battery Park City is facing a growing rat menace, residents said.

"I would never allow my grandchildren to touch or sit in the Wagner Park grass because I guarantee it is inundated with rat feces," one woman complained.

Horwitz asked the group for the location of rat sitings: Wagner Park, South Cove, Kowsky Plaza, West Thames Playground, the walkway near the ball fields, they shouted back.

"Basically, the whole neighborhood," Fran Miller said.

Tessa Huxley, executive director of the Battery Park City Parks Conservancy, said that people are helping the rat population grow by feeding birds and squirrels and mishandling garbage. Construction on Pier A also contributes to the problem, she said.

"We are going to have to try and figure out a rat agenda, so to speak, and really figure out how to tackle this problem," Horwitz said.

### Unwelcome Neighbors

Occupy Wall Street protesters have been sleeping in cars and vans in Battery Park City, according to several residents. They wanted to know if anything could be done about their new mobile neighbors.

Horwitz, who met with building managers earlier in the week to discuss the issue, said it is legal for car owners to sleep in their vehicles.

"For how long?" Battery Park City resident Peter Acken asked.

As long as they move their vehicle for street sweeping, was the reply.

"They are being very clever about it," Horwitz said. "They are actually following the parking rules."

Another resident complained about a white van that had been parked on Rector Street for weeks. Police are aware of the van and are watching it, Horwitz said.

### Tour Buses

Residents and Battery Park City staff alike have noticed an increase in parked buses in recent months, particularly on South End Avenue.

"What can a citizen do?" one man asked. "Calling 311 is ineffective."

Horwitz is asking residents to take pictures of tour buses idling in Battery Park City to help her pressure the Department of Transportation to tackle the growing issue.



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"I walk around Battery Park City with my Blackberry taking pictures of the buses and I send them to the [Department of Transportation's] borough commissioner," Horwitz said. "It is a pet peeve of mine."

Horwitz said she has been working with the Sept. 11 Memorial and the DOT to tackle the issue, and she is requesting more ticketing by police.

The Authority is setting up a special email address where residents can send their pictures. That address will be posted soon at batteryparkcity.org, Horwitz said.

### Recent Firings

Residents who came to the Town Hall meeting seeking answers about the abrupt firing of 19 Battery Park City Authority staff members last week left disappointed.

The workers, including a vice president of operations, vice president of human resources, and the vice president of community relations, were laid off on Nov. 9.

The dismissed staff were given no warning before they were fired, and were told their health insurance would be terminated at the end of the month, a fired staffer told the Trib.

Horwitz said the Authority had "restructured" its staff because the agency's mission was changing now that Battery Park City is fully built out.

"The authority is at a crossroads in our history and our mission is changing," Horwitz said. Some of the positions, an Authority spokesman has said, will be filled with new hires.

"Tonight is not to talk about personnel issues at the Authority, but really to discuss community issues," Horwitz said, after a resident asked how much money would be spent on consultants with so many long-term staffers gone. "But I assure you the services and the quality of services the community has grown accustomed to will not be impacted in any way."

That answer did not satisfy Dolores D'Agostino, who said she was frustrated by how residents' questions on the issue were side-stepped.

"You represent the community," D'Agostino told Horwitz. "You are not a private entity."

D'Agostino said she understood the Authority may have needed to change its staffing levels, but disagreed with the way it was done.

"If you have to downsize, there are things you can do to protect people," she said. "You don't just give them an envelope and tell them there is no severance pay. That was gross."

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## Battery Park City Authority President Defends Staff Firings

Submitted by admin on Sat, 12/10/2011 - 2:21am



CARL GLASSMAN / TRIBECATRIB

Battery Park City Authority president Gayle Horwitz at a meeting last month of the Authority's board.

For the first time since the mass termination of nearly half her staff on Nov. 9, the president of the Battery Park City Authority has spoken out publicly in defense of her controversial actions.

Gayle Horwitz, a former first deputy comptroller for the city who was appointed in October 2010 to head the Authority, said it was her job to bring credibility and efficiency to an agency that had been blasted by the state's Inspector General for excessive spending and mismanagement.

"The place has so many things to fix, and for a long time I didn't have the right team to be able to fix them. Things were just not working under that status quo," Horwitz told the Trib in an interview on Dec. 8. "Coming to work has been really unpleasant for a really, really long time because people were not willing to help out. There are all kinds of problems."

A major concern, she noted, was the escalating cost of projects in the procurement process and how contracts were amended. "There was this environment of spend and amend," she said. Horwitz cited the construction of

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outdoor art tables that were supposed to cost \$265,000 and ended up with a price tag of \$465,000. “And they still don’t work!” she exclaimed.

The 19 terminated staffers, who now call themselves the BPCA 19, allege that the firings were conducted in an unprofessional manner, and are seeking additional severance pay and further compensation that they believe they are owed.

“It was the most unprofessional treatment of employees I’ve ever experienced,” said the group’s spokesman, Hector Calderon, the director of diversity programs and 17-year Authority employee. Calderon said his abrupt dismissal was especially painful because he had saved the life of a co-worker on Sept. 11 and, after that, assisted in the recovery efforts in Battery Park City.

“We want to be treated with dignity,” he said.

“The people who were fired were the people who made Battery Park City successful,” said another former employee, who asked not to be identified. “It seems like poor payback.”



CARL GLASSMAN / TRIBECA TRIB

Hector Calderon and Leticia Remauro, former Battery Park City Authority employees whose jobs were terminated last month, in the lobby of 1 World Financial Center on Dec. 6. They were mistakenly kept from going upstairs to the Authority’s offices, where a meeting of Community Board 1’s Battery Park City Committee was being held. The matter was eventually resolved.

Among those terminated were two members of former BPCA President James Cavanaugh’s “inner circle” who were cited in the Inspector General’s report. The findings, which were highly critical of Cavanaugh, included inaccurate record keeping for mileage reimbursement by one of the employees and, from another, the refusal to answer questions posed by the Inspector General.

Horwitz said that employee interviews recently conducted by an audit firm uncovered “information that gave you cause for concern and areas we needed to take a look at.” She declined to elaborate on those concerns.

In addition, she said a staff “restructuring” was necessary to meet the future needs of Battery Park City, the 92-acre development that is now nearly complete. “We definitely had more people than there was work for,” she said.

But the terminated workers tell a far different story. They describe themselves as a dedicated team of longtime employees whose years of service have gone unappreciated by the new administration under Horwitz and its board chairman, William Thompson.

“We were the people who built that city,” Calderon said.

In an interview, Leticia Remauro, a former vice president in charge of community relations, pointed to the area’s post-Sept. 11 recovery, numerous planning and design awards, and the recent accolades of Community Board 1’s Battery Park City Committee—which voted on Tuesday to write personal letters of recommendation for all 19 terminated employees—as evidence of the good work that the staff was doing.

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Furthermore, Remauro said, it was up to Horwitz as CEO to coach staff members who were failing to meet her work standards.

"You could not get in to see her. She would be rude. She would yell," Remauro said, adding that Horwitz was vague about her expectations with staff. "She would reprimand people in public."

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CARL GLASSMAN / TRIBECA TRIB

With the development of Battery Park City now complete, Gayle Horwitz says she is preparing the Authority for a "new chapter."

The BPCA 19 sent a letter to the Authority's board requesting a chance to address it at its next meeting. (That meeting, which was to take place next Tuesday, will be rescheduled due to the lack of a quorum, according to Anne Fenton, an aide to Horwitz.)

"I do believe these gentlemen [on the board] are professional gentlemen and I believe when they recognize it was handled in an unprofessional manner they will do what they can," Remauro said.

Among their demands, the BPCA 19 is seeking paid health insurance for six months and six months severance pay, instead of the three weeks they were given. Remauro and Calderon said the last two terminated BPCA employees received six months severance.

But according to Horwitz, those two people were given "separation agreements" in exchange for signing a release promising not to disparage the Authority—a practice criticized in the Inspector General's report.

"They were silenced basically," Horwitz said. "I did not go down that path because it really goes against public policy, and if you've noticed in the past month everyone has been saying whatever they want to say."

Horwitz met with the entire staff on the morning of Nov. 9, informing them that there would be layoffs as part of an ongoing reorganization at the Authority. Everyone was instructed to go back to their offices, after which a Human Resources Department employee handed out the termination notices.

"This difficult decision has been made as part of an overall restructuring of the Authority's operations to better meet the changing needs of the organization," the letter stated.

The letter informed the employees that their jobs were being terminated as of that day, that their medical insurance would end after Nov. 30, and that staff members would be paid for all accrued leave time.

The letter, signed by Horwitz, ended with a single sentence that offered little comfort to terminated employees—some of whom had worked for the Authority for two decades.

"Thank you for your service to the Battery Park City Authority," it said.

"Why wouldn't you take these professional people and sit them in a room and individually exit them out?" asked Remauro, a 12-year veteran of the Authority.

The former employees complained that they were only given a few short hours to pack up and leave, and had no chance to pass along information about the projects they were working on and where to find files.

Horwitz said it is standard practice for terminated employees to be given limited access to files, and the action was necessary to protect the Authority.

"Unfortunately, you have to protect the assets of the organization. It is very standard for computers to be turned off and for people to be only given a few hours to pack their things," she said.

According to Horwitz, her decision to lay off the workers was not made lightly, but came only after giving much time and thought to the future needs of the Authority.

"I could have just come to work, collected my paycheck, gone home and not have deal with this. It obviously would have been a lot easier for everybody," she said. "I don't relish what happened."

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## BPCA President Quit for California Job



Demetrios A. Boutris with chairman Dennis Mehel at the Battery Park City Authority board meeting last October, where Mehel introduced him as the authority's new president. Photo: Carl Glassman/Tribeca Trib

By **CARL GLASSMAN**


Posted Aug. 22, 2013

Battery Park City Authority president Demetrios A. Boutris, who quit his briefly held job suddenly and without explanation on Aug. 16, is taking a position in his home state of California.

Beginning in October, Boutris will head a land development and land consulting company based in Roseville, Calif., according to an announcement released Thursday by the company, KT Communities. Boutris started at the authority last October.

It is still unclear why Boutris quit with no notice or public comment.

BPCA chairman Dennis Mehel named chief financial officer Robert Serpico as the authority's interim president and chief operating officer. At a meeting of the BPCA board of directors on Tuesday, Aug. 20, Mehel lightheartedly referred to Serpico, a 27-year veteran of the authority, as "the boss," but otherwise made no



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mention of the transition during the meeting.

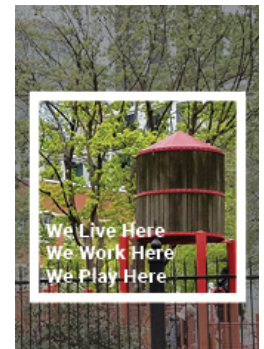
Boutris, a lawyer, has long been associated with Miehle in support of Greek-American causes. He came to the authority from California, where he was a business consultant and real estate investor, splitting his time between homes in Los Angeles and Sacramento and the Upper West Side, where his wife and two sons lived. According to the KT Communities statement, Boutris has "previously consulted extensively with KT Communities and its founder and chairman, Kyriakos Tsakopoulos."

Boutris had given up his business interests to take the BPCA job, according to the authority at the time of his appointment.



Robert Serpico was named interim president and chief operating officer of the Battery Park City Authority following the resignation of Demetrios Boutris. Photo: Carl Glassman/Tribeca Trib

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## CB1 to BPCA: Rethink 'Flawed' Selection Process for Next Marina Operator



As they do each December, workers prepare Manhattan Sailing Club boats for removal from the North Cove Marina. Photo: Allan Tannenbaum/Tribeca Trib

**By AMANDA WOODS**

Posted Dec. 22, 2014

Community Board 1 wants the Battery Park City Authority to scrap its request for proposals for a new North Cove Marina operator so that the community can play a greater role in deciding who will run the marina.

In a resolution passed on Dec. 18, the board called on the authority to start a new proposal review to ensure that the selected applicant “will support the public good, be a steward of our parklands and generate a reasonable revenue stream.”

The resolution comes in the wake of mounting pressure by supporters of the popular current operator, Michael Fortenbaugh, to keep operating the marina, where he has been running a sailing club and sailing school for many years. Fortenbaugh says he fears he will lose out on the bid to more powerful competition, namely Brookfield Office Properties, the landlord of the World Financial Center, which overlooks the marina. Following a bidding process that began in September, the authority is expected to announce its decision next month.

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At the board's general meeting on Thursday, about 30 supporters spoke out in support of Fortenbaugh, including six teens who have attended Fortenbaugh's Teen Sailing Camp and helped gather some of the more than 1,000 signatures in a petition to reopen the selection process.

"We all feel that after we watched Commodore Michael Fortenbaugh put his blood, sweat and tears into this, to just let it be taken away isn't the right or fair thing to do or what Commodore Michael deserves," said Zach Cassell, one of the teens.

The resolution came a week after the authority informed Fortenbaugh, whose lease expires on Dec. 31, that it would take over the marina as an "interim measure" on Jan. 1. Following that decision, [about 200 supporters gathered at the marina last week](#) to rally behind

Fortenbaugh in hopes that he could continue running the marina. Earlier this month, the authority's board failed to vote on its selection of an operator because it lacked a quorum.

Battery Park City Committee chair Anthony Notaro told the board at its general meeting that the request for proposals is "flawed" because one of its criteria, which requires that the new operator demonstrate "quality and strength of proposed community-based programming, including educational opportunities for children and teenagers, that is accessible at every income level," only holds 15 percent of the weight in the overall decision.

"They so diminish the value of that so that anyone with a large checkbook could come in and answer the [request for proposals] and potentially be a competitor," Notaro said. "So we need this withdrawn and rewritten, but at a bare minimum, we need that to be the number one criteria—community-based programming and a proven track record doing that."

"Gaining community input should be a requirement and a priority," he added.

Asked by the Trib to respond to CB1's resolution and its call for more community input, the authority issued this statement: "The North Cove Marina is a public asset and as such, the Authority is required to select an operator through a competitive bid process. Recognizing the value of this asset to both the BPC community and the public at large, the bids requested by the authority require operators to continue the ongoing operation of a sailing school at a reasonable cost to users as well as enhanced programming and opportunities for greater access to the waterfront."

The resolution also includes a plea to local elected officials to "express the will of the community to the Battery Park City Authority."

Councilwoman Margaret Chin and State Senator Daniel Squadron are already on board, without explicitly endorsing Fortenbaugh.

"The Councilmember has said on the record that she feels it's very important that a community-based operator be maintained for that site, and we know that Michael Fortenbaugh has done great work," Yume Kitasei, Chin's chief of staff, said at the meeting. "As a personal note, I was actually in his program for young teens and so I know that he's done some great work."

"I want to make it clear that Daniel has come out in support of the Sailing Club and a great job is being done in engaging the community, making them an active part here in Lower Manhattan," Melissa Gindin, Squadron's district liaison, said. "I hope you all know that we hear your concerns. We feel the support for Michael."

In addressing the community board, Fortenbaugh called the authority "secretive" in its handling of the selection process.

"Suddenly we find ourselves unsure of where we are," Fortenbaugh said, adding, "We're just asking for an open process."



At the December meeting of Community Board 1, speakers line up to express their support for Michael Fortenbaugh and his continuation as the operator of the North Cove Marina. At the microphone is Kiera Galloway, who took lessons at Manhattan Sailing School as a high school freshman. Photo: Amanda Woods/Tribeca Trib

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## Tide Turns at North Cove Marina with Approval of New Operator



A tug hauls some of Michael Fortenbaugh's docks from the North Cove Marina to its new home across the river at Liberty Harbor Marina. Photo: Carl Glassman/Tribeca Trib

By **AMANDA WOODS**

Posted Jan. 23, 2015

The bitter struggle by Michael Fortenbaugh and his supporters over operation of the North Cove Marina ended last month with a unanimous vote by the Battery Park City Authority board to hand over control of the marina to Brookfield Office Properties, the landlords of the giant office complex that towers above the cove.

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